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ABSTRACT

Examined are three distinct forces--teacher unions, civil rights under law, and educational strategy--which have converged on the issue of educating those handicapped learners who, with proper support resources, can be maintained in regular graded classrooms. Briefly discussed are the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) definitions of mainstreaming; the process of collective bargaining; and 1975 AFT and NEA policies. Statements on mainstreaming from CEC are included and compared to collective bargaining agreements in force in Michigan during the 1974-1975 school year and key phrases taken from AFT and NEA mainstreaming policies. (SB)

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TEACHER'S UNIONS ON MAINSTREAMING

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Mainstreaming has impacted upon the Nation's schools backed by the force of civil rights under law. Much concern has developed about the inherent readjustment of attitudes, organization, and administration which the mainstreaming movement necessitates (Jones & MacMillan, 1974).

Until 1975, only the Council for Exceptional Children (1971) had any formal policy with respect to mainstreaming--or, more precisely, on the education of exceptional children in the "least restrictive environment." In 1975, three other major national educational organizations formally adopted policies specific to mainstreaming, viz., The American Federation of Teachers, The Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Education Association. This article focuses on the formal mainstreaming policies of the AFT and NEA since much of the concern expressed relates to the uncertainty of the reactions of the teachers' unions to mainstreaming. The purpose of this article is to allay the notion that teachers' unions oppose mainstreaming. Since policies guide action, this review carries its examination to the local affiliate level to determine the consistency of locally negotiated collective bargaining contracts with national policy.

Mainstreaming in Focus

Only the term "mainstreaming" is new. What makes the difference contemporarily is the scope and rapidity of the implementation of the mainstreaming concept. Basically, mainstreaming refers only to the integration of certain handicapped children into regular graded classrooms, when appropriate, and with adequate support resources in order to maintain them therein.

Placement of handicapped children into regular graded classrooms, i.e., "mainstreaming" is only one element of the principle of educational placement in the "least restrictive environment" (Weintraub & Abeson, 1976). The principle applies to any placement that is appropriate to a child's needs. It requires, furthermore, that adequate and appropriate support resources are made available to the learner and to the teacher. Less than that would not be mainstreaming, but rather simply reclassification to regular education. The principle of the least restrictive environment provides for a continuum of placement possibilities including the regular classroom (with support), the special education classroom and the institution as the need may be. The aim is to provide the best possible educational environment appropriate to the needs and capacities of the child. The provision of such an environment and determination of those needs of the child must be based on the collective judgment of teachers (regular and special), administrators, other specialized personnel, and the parents of the child.

Collective Bargaining and Mainstreaming

With the adoption of formal policy by teachers' unions, it is reasonable to assume that collective bargaining will be influenced. The potential scope of the influence extends at least to all states that have mandatory collective bargaining or meet and confer laws. Ross Vlaanderen, and Millard (1976) report that all but 19 states have such mandatory laws. They note further (p.1) that "with or without enabling legislation, collective bargaining is being practiced across the nation."

The prospect of a national collective bargaining law for public employees

is on the horizon; the implications of such a law are clear, have been debated extensively. The final connection to be made in this context is that special education issues, including mainstreaming, have been negotiated in collective bargaining agreements (Sosnowsky & Coleman, 1971; Jones & MacMillan, 1974; Weintraub & Abeson, 1976).

The 1975 AFT and NEA Policies

In Figure 1 the mainstreaming policies of the AFT and NEA are set forth. Accompanying these policies is a clarifying statement on mainstreaming issuing from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). It is to be noted that in addition to policies at issue, the AFT and NEA have other formal policies regarding special education and exceptional persons.

Figure 1 About Here

Examination of the policies shows that mainstreaming is defined by each organization by way of concerns and provisos. The AFT policy directs its affiliates to bargaining for certain issues. It is clear that while the positions on mainstreaming are firmly expressed and conditional, mainstreaming is supported by the teachers' unions. In comparing the AFT and NEA policies with the CEC statement, it is seen that, in general, all are in agreement. The three organizations, in their respective ways, agree that adequate funding must be available for the proper implementation of mainstreaming. On the matter of funding, the reader is referred to Public Law 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Act of 1975. The Act authorizes $300 million over a two-year period, and, for the first time in public policy, includes the principle of the least restrictive environment.

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FIGURE 1

Statements on Mainstreaming:

American Federation of Teachers, Council for Exceptional Children, National Education Association

American Federation of Teachers
Policy Resolution #59 (1975)[1]
SPECIAL EDUCATION-MAINSTREAMING

WHEREAS, mainstreaming means helping exceptional people participate as much as possible in our public schools and our society, and

WHEREAS, mainstreaming is a commitment to integrating people who are exceptional into our society, and

WHEREAS, the concept of mainstreaming provides the opportunity for handicapped children to spend increasing amounts of time in the regular public school classrooms, and

WHEREAS, children in mainstream settings have shown an increased ability to cope with their handicaps, to deal effectively with reality, and to relate to other children, and

WHEREAS, many teachers of special education classes have been displaced, laid off or forced to become retrained in other disciplines of special education, and

WHEREAS, the concept of mainstreaming has been misinterpreted, abused and implemented without the joint recommendation of the special education teacher, psychologist, supportive staff as well as the administrator, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the AFT support and encourage the concept of mainstreaming for handicapped children, both moderate and severe to the degree recommended by the psychologist, special education teacher, administrator, and classroom teacher, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the AFT encourage local unions to work actively to promote legislation to gain federal funding of special education programs to provide mainstream settings, to train additional special education personnel, to provide necessary supportive services for such mainstreaming programs, and be it further

RESOLVED, that in the implementation of the mainstreaming program, collective bargaining agreements entered into by local unions include adequate provisions for viable class size and protection against the dimunution of their special certificates or licenses of both the special education and regular education teachers affected by the program.

Council for Exceptional Children

WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING?[2]

The term "mainstreaming" has been used frequently and in different ways during the last few years. Along with its varied meanings has come confusion regarding what the word really means. While there may not be a definition that is universally agreed on, there are some basic themes that can be looked to for an understanding of the intent of mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming is:

- -providing the most appropriate education for each child in the least restrictive setting.
- -looking at the educational needs of children instead of clinical or diagnostic labels such as mentally handicapped, learning disabled, physically handicapped, hearing impaired, or gifted.
- -looking for and creating alternatives that will help general educators serve children with learning or adjustment problems in the regular setting. Some approaches being used to help achieve this are consulting teachers, methods and materials specialists, itinerant teachers and resource room teachers.
- -uniting the skills of general education and special education so that all children may have equal educational opportunity.

Mainstreaming is not:

- -wholesale return of all exceptional children in special classes to regular classes.
- -permitting children with special needs to remain in regular classrooms without the support services that they need.
- -ignoring the need of some children for a more specialized program than can be provided in the general education program.
- -less costly than serving children in special self contained classrooms.

National Education Association
Policy Resolution #26 (1975)
MAINSTREAMING[3]

The NEA will support mainstreaming handicapped students only when:

a. It provides a favorable learning experience both for handicapped and for regular students.
b. Regular and special teachers and administrators share equally in its planning and implementation.
c. Regular and special teachers are prepared for these roles.
d. Appropriate instructional materials, supportive services, and pupil personnel services are provided for the teacher and the handicapped student.
e. Modifications are made in class size, scheduling, and curriculum design to accommodate the shifting demands that mainstreaming creates.
f. There is a systematic evaluation and reporting of program developments.
g. Adequate additional funding and resources are provided for mainstreaming and are used exclusively for that purpose.

[1]American Federation of Teachers, 1975 Convention Resolutions, 1975, p. 64.

[2]Council for Exceptional Children, "What is Mainstreaming?", Exceptional Children, 42:3, November, 1975, p. 174.

[3]National Education Association, Resolutions, New Business and Other Actions, 1975, pp.21-22.

National Policy - Local Practice

Do the policies of the AFT and NEA affect collective bargaining by local school district affiliates? At this time the question can only be partially answered. It can be said, however, that policies reflect local practice to some degree. In the four subsections which follow an item taken from a pool of 80 CB agreements[1] in force in Michigan during the 1974-1975 school year is juxtaposed with a key phrase taken from the AFT and NEA mainstreaming policies. To show that local contracts are also often consistent with the CEC, a similar juxtaposition of contract items with the CEC statement is also included. The affiliation of the local district contract is disregarded, the aim being to illustrate that approximate contract language has been negotiated.

1. Policy elements and contract items of a philosophic nature.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . a commitment to integrating people who are exceptional into our society. . .

CB ITEM: . . . There will be no discrimination against any . . . student by reason of physical, mental, economic, or social condition. . .

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . looking at educational needs . . . instead of clinical or diagnostic labels . . .

CB ITEM: If the child does not qualify for a special education program or service, the teacher shall receive all possible assistance, advice, and service from other personnel to assist in meeting the needs of the child.

CB ITEM: When it is suspected that a student's needs require the services of the special education department, a referral shall be forwarded to that department.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . opportunity . . . to spend increasing amounts of time in the regular . . . classrooms.

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[1]The agreements were obtained from the school districts with the promise of anonymity in any reporting.

CB ITEM: They shall continue to participate in all special area classes appropriate to the age levels and capacities of the students involved.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . providing the most appropriate education in the least restrictive setting.

CB ITEM: The parties recognize the value of sound special education programs for grades K-12. All children who qualify will have an equal opportunity to participate in these special programs.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . provide favorable learning experiences both for handicapped and regular students.

CB ITEM: Students from special education classes shall be integrated into regular classrooms whenever this would be educationally beneficial for such students and is in accordance with sound educational practices.

CB ITEM: Classroom teachers shall bring to the attention of their principal, students whose special physical, learning, or adjustment problems make extraordinary or unfair demands on the teacher or other students.

2. Policy elements and contract items pertaining to pupils.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . not ignoring the needs of some children for a more specialized program than can be provided in general education.

CB ITEM: The parties recognize the possibility of a special student being disruptive within the classroom. Such a student may, by mutual consent of the teacher and administrator, be removed from the classroom pending a conference by the district screening committee to provide special help for such a child.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . not permitting children with special needs to remain in regular classrooms without (needed) support services.

CB ITEM: If a child qualifies for special education placement, but it is not immediately available, the child shall be placed on a waiting list. The teacher shall receive all possible advice and assistance from other . . . personnel relative to the needs of the child.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . not wholesale return of all children in special classes to regular classes.

CB ITEM: If . . . placement in a regular classroom is detrimental to quality education, efforts shall be made to place such child in the appropriate special areas. When placement is available . . ., such child shall not be placed in a regular classroom.

CB ITEM: The board will make every effort to place students designated as special education students into proper special education classes.

3. Policy elements and contract items pertaining to pedagogues and other professionals.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . include adequate provisions (in CB agreement) for protection against the diminution of . . . special certificates or licenses of both special . . . and regular . . . teachers . . .

CB ITEM: . . . exceptional children having special physical, mental, and/or emotional problems require specialized experiences by specifically certified teachers.

CB ITEM: a teacher may not be fairly expected to assume the role of custodian for, nor be charged with the ongoing responsibility for emotionally, mentally, or physically handicapped students when diagnosed as such by competent authorities.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . uniting the skills of general . . . and special education so that all children may have equal educational opportunity.

CB ITEM: The parties . . . will cooperate to correlate their activities with the regular classroom activities of the teacher and the special services within the building so as to better meet the needs of special students in the community.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . provide that regular and special teachers are prepared for these roles . . .

CB ITEM: The parties recognize the need for the identification of these students, the training of educators, and provision for the development of programs at this local level.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . teachers of special education . . . have been displaced, laid-off or forced to become retrained in other disciplines of special education.

CB ITEM: Elementary, junior . . ., and senior high school councils shall act in an advisory capacity in the preparation of contract proposals. The elementary council shall include a special education teacher . . . priorities at each level shall be determined by a vote of the membership.

CB ITEM: Special education and elementary specialist department agreement implementation meetings: . . . the purpose of the meetings will be to review the administration of the Agreement relating to the individual teacher and/or departments, and to resolve any problems that arise.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . looking for the creating alternatives that . . . help general educators serve (exceptional) children in the regular setting.

CB ITEM: There shall be created a special service advisory committee. The purpose of the committee shall be to recommend to the superintendent, programs to meet the special needs of these students.

4. Policy elements and contract items regarding program.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . include adequate provisions (in CB agreements) for viable class size . . .

CB ITEM: When students normally assigned to special education classes are integrated into a regular classroom, they shall be counted as two in computing the number of students in the regular class.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . provide . . . a systematic evaluation and reporting of progress . . .

CB ITEM: A joint administration/union committee shall be established to study the effect of mandatory special education on the district to determine necessary changes and/or modifications for upgrading the special education programs.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . modifications in curriculum design to accommodate the shifting demands that mainstreaming creates.

CB ITEM: The parties recognize that there must be increased development of regular educational programs to meet the needs of several groups of students.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . approaches . . . used . . . are consulting teachers, methods and materials specialists, itinerant teachers, and resource room teachers.

CB ITEM: Some children need tutoring, some should be in special classes, others need special resource teachers.

CB ITEM: The parties recognize the importance of supportive services personnel in enriching the curriculum.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . provide that appropriate instructional materials, supportive services, and pupil personnel services are provided for the teacher and student.

CB ITEM: (When) such a child is to be placed in a regular classroom, the following provisions shall obtain:

A child will be placed . . . with the teacher's full knowledge and understanding of the child's handicap.

The teacher will be supplied with adequate materials and specialized equipment . . . for the proper education of the child . . ., as determined by the educational planning and placement committee.

The services of a consultant specialist in the specific area of handicap will be made available to the classroom teacher.

POLICY ELEMENT: . . . mainstreaming has been implemented without the joint recommendation of the special education teacher, psychologist, supportive staff as well as the administrator.

> CB ITEM: As early as possible after the evaluation (of the child) a meeting of all involved staff members will be held to formulate a recommendation for an appropriate program for the pupil.
>
> CB ITEM: Students found to be in need of special services by the . . . psychologist will be considered by the educational planning and placement committee.

At the beginning of this array of policy and collective bargaining contract language it was asserted that the AFT and NEA mainstreaming policies reflect local practice. In order to determine the further influence of the policies on local practice, it will be necessary to examine contracts that were negotiated, subsequent to the spring of 1975, when the policies were adopted. A final matter to be noted in this context, is that contract language exists, as shown, in support of the principles established by the Council for Exceptional Children.

Summary

In summary, this paper has examined three distinct forces, in their applied forms, which have converged on the issue of educating a certain segment of the handicapped learner population. The segment comprises those handicapped learners who, with proper support resources, can be maintained in regular graded classrooms. The forces are teacher unions (and collective bargaining), civil rights under law (integration and non-discrimination), and educational strategy (mainstreaming within the principle of the least restrictive environment).

The evidence strongly suggests that the AFT and NEA policies, and constituent local affiliates presently reinforce the aims of civil rights, e.g.

quality, and equality of education in the public schools of the Nation. The issue is not entirely settled. It is predicted, however, that these three forces will continue their readjustments, on a rational basis, each with the major tools available to them.

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